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The 21st Century has brought more technology into the lives of Americans than Buck Rogers could have ever imagined. And not surprisingly, much of our electronic advancement is linked to space. While it is recognized that all nations have a right to utilize space for their benefit, this does not mean that we must sacrifice our ability to protect those valuable assets. It is clear that we must develop a balanced space control policy that reflects our need for uncompromised and safe space assets as well as promoting the safety of civilian space-related infrastructure.

Today, as never before, the United States depends greatly on activities conducted hundreds of miles over our heads through constellations of satellites and their ground stations back on earth. Yet, for all their sophistication, these cutting-edge systems which make our lives much easier and our country safer are also vulnerable to enemy attack. It is time for the nation to recognize this threat and take action to prevent chaos at home and on the high-tech battlefield. Consider, for example, the havoc and costs that several computer-based viruses wreaked on unsuspecting individuals in the last few years. The ability to compromise satellite delivery and data is even more alarming.

It's well known that our military, especially our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, depends on space every moment of the day. Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites guide munitions, aircraft and vehicles through the theater of battle. Other satellite systems enable our war fighters with real-time communications, intelligence, and weather monitoring capabilities.

Our space assets provide national policy makers critical intelligence necessary for ensuring compliance with arms control treaties, tracking weapons proliferation activities, and monitoring disaster relief operations.

But few recognize that a routine task like making a call from a cellular phone or withdrawing cash from an ATM has space connections. Moreover, other essential civilian activities rely on space assets and involve critical operations like air traffic control, harbor security, and storm tracking. Even production agriculture has become reliant on GPS to precisely apply seed, fertilizer and herbicides for more efficient and safer farming methods. Not only do these space systems allow America to enjoy the cheapest food supply in the world, but they also make farming much more environmentally friendly. These space assets are a seamless and integral part of our day-to-day lives and as a nation we must take action to protect this national investment.

I believe it's the responsibility and obligation of the Federal government to protect and defend our space-based technology much in the same way we protect and defend our assets in the air, at sea, or on the ground. As such, the need for a clear and concise national space control policy is more important than ever.

A range of options exist for our national space control policy. These options run the gamut of depending on situational awareness in space, to the physical destruction of adversarial targets that pose a threat. This policy should address three key components: 1) susceptibility of our assets in space, 2) the vulnerability of space assets on the ground (like our mission control stations), and 3) the integrity of data passed through these assets. At a minimum, the final solution must include the development of a comprehensive capability that will alleviate our current state of blindness to even small objects in space.

The Department of Defense and industry must work together to develop and employ engineering solutions that will increase the protection of our nation's military and civilian space-related infrastructure. Additionally, the nation must develop a strategy and advance capabilities to render attacks against our space systems useless and inflict painful ramifications to any adversary. Given our dependence on this vast resource, it is clear that we must safeguard and protect it. It is also clear, however, that we cannot jeopardize the security of our men and women in uniform by allowing our space-based communications systems to be vulnerable to attack.

Development of a well-thought space control policy is the right and responsible action. This year the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces will grapple with this important issue in an attempt to bring to light the realities of today's space-reliant environment. The goal will be to inform the nation of this challenge and articulate a legislative solution to the development of a national space control policy.

The time is at hand to unify divergent strategies to protect our national interests. I welcome all those with good ideas and a willingness to work together to develop a national space control policy for the benefit and security of our country.